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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Committee on Foreign Affairs and Security

Sub-Committee on Human Rights

Public hearing on respect for Human Rights in East Timor

The Sub-Committee on Human Rights held its public hearing on "respect for human rights in East Timor" in Brussels on 23 April 1992 with Messrs COATES (SOC/UK) and BERTENS (LDR/NL) alternating in the chair and in the presence of Members of the diplomatic corps of Indonesia, Australia, Malaysia, Portugal and Germany as well as representatives of certain interest groups. The participation of the Indonesian Ambassador, an Indonesian government official and a member of the Indonesian Parliament was the unexpected event of the public hearing. Contrary to expectations, the Indonesians had accepted the last minute the invitation of the Sub-Committee to appear before it. This necessitated the rearranging of the programme in order to accomodate both the Indonesian and Portuguese delegations, a formula giving them equal time having been worked out the previous evening.

In the morning, presentations were given. Dr John TAYLOR, lecturer at South Bank Polytechnic, gave an overview of the political and historical situation in East Timor. He emphasized the opportunity now available to reach a settlement to the conflict due to changes to the world and regional geo-political context brought about by the end of the Cold War. Ms Sidney JONES of Asia Watch gave an account of the human rights record in the territory, which was invaded and occupied by Indonesian troops in 1975, including the massacre in Dili last November. She urged the use of various forums to press for answers to the massacre, stressing in particular the World Bank and the meeting between ASEAN and the EC. The latter was, she suggested, an opportunity for the review of human rights violations and furthermore, if no answers were forthcoming, a close look at how development aid was assigned in SE Asia should be undertaken. Mr Russel ANDERSEN, an Australian journalist and eyewitness of the Dili massacre, gave an account of the events. This was followed by a panel of three East Timorese : Mr Donaciano GOMES spoke on the role of the church in the struggle for human rights, Mr José Evaristo MADEIRA SOARES on relations between the Indonesian authorities and the East Timorese, and Mrs Sebastiana SALDANHA on disappearances and family reunification problems. The three listed numerous methods and cases of abuse and torture. Questions were posed by many of the parliamentarians.

In the afternoon, the floor was first given to His Excellency Mr Atmono SURYO, Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia to the EC, who was accompanied by Mr LOPES DA CRUZ, Member of the Supreme Advisory Council, and by Mr AMARAL, an Indonesian MP. Mr SURYO managed to rile a good number of the parliamentarians through his emphasis in his presentation on economic rights and development and through the length of his speech which

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Copie : Mmes et MM. les Membres de la Commission
Mmes et MM. les Directeurs Généraux

was perceived by some MEPs as a stalling tactic to avoid answering any questions on human rights violations per se. Mr LOPES DA CRUZ, himself an East Timorese, reading a prepared statement on the irreversability of the integration process, did little to calm tempers. In the end it was agreed to accept Mr SURYO's suggestions of the submission of written questions to the Indonesian Embassy by MEPs and a future appearance by the Ambassador himself before the Sub-Committee.

Mr Riu QUARTIN SANTOS, an official of the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, responsible for the East Timor file, gave a detailed account of the diplomatic and political positions of Portugal and the EC and of the possibilities for negotiations and resolution of the problem. He underscored Portugal's willingness to continue on the road of negotiation and dialogue as the only road to peace. He also discussed the situation vis-à-vis the UN.

The last participants of the day appeared as a panel. Dr José RAMOS HORTA, spokesman in exile, and Special Representative of the National Council of Maubere Resistance (CNRM), presented a three-phase plan for the resolution of the conflict. Mr Liem SOEI LIONG discussed political developments in Indonesia and was generally optimistic for an end to the conflict in the longer term due to increasing awareness and concern about the East Timor problem among the people of Indonesia. Lastly, Mr José DIAS gave an account of the protest movement and the treatment and trial of protestors by the Indonesian police and authorities.

As earlier the various presentations and speeches were followed by questions and comments by parliamentarians. The Portugese and Dutch members were particularly active, but not alone in participating in the lively exchange (Mrs BELO (SOC/P), Mr LUCAS PIRES (EPP/P), Mrs VAN PUTTEN (SOC/NL), Mr KOSTOPOULOS (SOC/GR), Mr NEWENS (SOC/UK), Mr TRIVELLI (GUE/I), Lord BETHEL (ED/UK).

Principal questions concerned international reaction and pressure on Indonesia, the role of the United Nations, the right and desire for self-determination and independance of the East Timorese, Indonesian willingness to accept this, linkage between development aid and respect for human rights, and the extent of the East Timorese people's support for the resistance, as well as detailed questions concerning the political situation and actual human rights conditions and torture. Of particular interest to a number of MEPs were various participants' thoughts and reactions to a possible visit to East Timor by a European Parliament delegation.

In his closing remarks, Mr COATES stated that the Sub-Committee had the absolute right to raise the issue of human rights and was disposed to carry on the dialogue, but that the only guaranteed action the Sub-Committee could give was a continuation of the pressure through European Parliament resolutions. Moreover, he urged the members to "ponder, consider and then elaborate thoughtful resolutions", encouraged the Portugese government to continue to advise the Sub-Committee on the situation, and stressed the need for very detailed and careful preparation of any EP delegation to East Timor.

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